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to research libraries. The general reader interested in Iranian, Afghan, or even Dutch history would also find sections of the work enlightening, amusing, sometimes appalling, and often fascinating.

RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN, *Waqfs and Urban Structures: The Case of Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999). \$69.00.

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In *Waqfs and Urban Structures*, Richard van Leeuwen gives a clear and coherent thesis regarding the evolution of Damascene waqfs throughout the Ottoman period. Since the takeover in 1516 of Greater Syria by the Ottomans, “*waqfs* were an integral part of imperial policy and were used as a mechanism to foster the cohesion between the centre of authority and the conquered provinces” (p. 148). A number of phenomena point in that direction, all of which seem to confirm the thesis of the strengthening of ties between Damascus and Istanbul. A number of sultans, beginning with Selim, who entered Damascus in 1516, erected their own waqfs within the city. Ties were strengthened with local families either through *iqtaʿ* grants or prestigious appointments to religious positions. Positions of judges, muftis, and administrators to major public waqfs, were all intermittently infused with elements from outside the city—or, at least, with elements known for their loyalty to the “center.” These elements were not exclusively from within the hierarchy of *aʿyān* and ulama, and the local would be mixed with loyal elements from other provinces. Above all, the local governors were for the most part—with the notable exception of the *ʿĀzms*—Turkish, or at least from non-Arab provinces. Van Leeuwen argues—and that is his main thesis—that such phenomena constituted a clear indication of “centralizing tendencies” (p. 114) whose aim was for the imperial state to interfere in and control some of the major local institutions, among them, of course, the waqfs. Even though van Leeuwen makes it plain that such practices of “interference” did not imply that “*waqfs* were appropriated by the central government” (p. 87), there was nevertheless a deliberate urban policy of spatial control (the way waqfs were distributed). Control was imposed either through resource management (how rents and leases were granted) and appointments to major religious and judicial positions or through a reframing of the law to buttress the imperial grip over the city. Van Leeuwen’s main thesis is indeed far broader than a study of urban waqfs. It uses the example of waqfs to show that, contrary to many theses of “decentralization” in which the “center” is portrayed as losing its grip over the provinces (the so-called peripheries), the state did its best not to relinquish control over major urban institutions. In short, the “centralizing efforts” (p. 115) of the imperial state is the motto of this study.

Because the process of centralization was vast and complex enough and not limited to a single domain, van Leeuwen’s arguments could prove convincing, or less so, depending on the area under scrutiny (appointments to offices, the law, shariʿa courts, urban infrastructure, etc.). The main drawback of the book, however, remains its main thesis—centralization. In fact, van Leeuwen borrows an already confusing theme from the Ottoman historiography of the past few decades without subjecting it to much scrutiny. The corollary to centralization—namely decentralization—is what usually fuels the debate, considering its political undertone. Since the provinces of the empire had become autonomous nation-states after World War I, if not earlier, attempts to prove their quasi-“autonomy” prior to colonial rule have become quite popular. This is particularly the case when contemporary concerns over the nation-state are at stake: if Ottoman control proves minimal, then those “societies” did not achieve their independence through colonial rule. Rather, they did it on their own, because “it was all there” in the first

place. In his centralization thesis, van Leeuwen does not seem to have any political motives, and his enterprise aims no more than toward historical objectivity and the search for reliable criteria. The problem, however, resides not in his sources (even though they are not always systematically scrutinized) but in the concept of centralization itself. Initially, this concept emerged first in the Western literature to describe a process of central control over regional institutions by creating a unified set of norms. The purpose was to show that historically the Western nation-states were able to survive only by controlling and homogenizing all kinds of societal institutions, a process that Max Weber described as a systematic and formal rationalization of the life-world (*lebenswelt*). Thus, and to pick up on the example of the birth of the English common law, a concerted effort was deployed throughout the 12th and 13th centuries with the sole aim of establishing one national feudal law—not Roman or canon law—that would pose itself over all the local and regional customs. There was one corps of itinerant royal justices, the “eyres,” to administer and develop it. Moreover, procedure would be by writ, which meant that a complaint had to fit within a well-defined formula. To be sure, and in hindsight, that was a model of centralization and rationalization of the legal and political resources at its best, one that would ensure the dominance of England until the early 20th century.

When we come to the strategies of centralization that van Leeuwen describes in his book, they indeed turn out to be of a totally different nature. For one thing, appointments of “loyal” people to fill the positions of judges, muftis, administrators, preachers, and teachers only manifest attempts to ensure “loyalty” and do not point in any way to structural modifications of such positions, however crucial and visible they might have been. Moreover, even though shari’a, in its Hanafi version, might have been permeated by opinions that point to the state’s interference, it remains to be seen how all this had affected judicial decision making in the courts or other institutions. Hanafi practice shared a heavy tradition of *taqlid*, and even if we scrutinize the *shurūh* and *fatāwā* texts, it is hard to discern any radical change in doctrine, at least one that would point to the fingers of the state and its desire to centralize. In fact, unless there are indications to the contrary, there was no desire to homogenize (or centralize) Hanafi practice, and appointing a loyal judge or mufti, or reframing fatwas to make them congruent with some of Ebu’s-su’ud’s opinions (p. 115), were definitely not exercises in state control. In fact, Ebu’s-su’ud’s fatwas look in hindsight much more radical in their perspective than anything Greater Syria had ever produced (an indication of how much the bureaucratization of the ulama corps was successful at the imperial center). A careful examination of the *fiqh* literature only shows that the *fuqahā’* manifested no concern for integrating the Istanbul mufti’s opinions within their own work. As the English example shows, state control and homogenization need much more drastic efforts to be fully operative and meaningful than the sporadic labors described by van Leeuwen. Such a concerted effort would only begin late in the second half of the 19th century, and the Ottomans had to learn the merits of rationalization the hard way.

It would be more appropriate to describe the Ottoman measures as partial attempts toward rationalization, with the primary aim of controlling the fiscal revenues of the conquered territories. Obviously, in the meantime, such measures did have symbolic returns, as all economic performances do, but their main purpose—besides granting the loyalty of elites and their subjects—was to impose a new system of rent control. In effect, with the measures deployed by the state to enforce the propagation of some public waqfs, the waqf system became the main competitor to the *mīrī* (both the early *timār*, and the *iltizām*) in managing taxes and rents, assuming, of course, that a distinction between the two fiscal categories proves relevant. If we posit the “rent” as the amount (in kind or cash) that the tenant-farmer or peasant paid to the landlord, then the *mīrī* system, whether in its early militaristic form or in its later more competitive formula, had definitely contributed to an overall decline of the value of rents. In fact, considering the large sums that *timār*-holders and *multazims* had to pay the state, in addition to

the surplus they extracted from the peasantry, the whole *mīrī* system became an abusive corvée labor in which rents were minimal and taxation a meaningless category. As a result, waqf rents declined for the simple reason that they became uncompetitive vis-à-vis the *mīrī*, and up to the 19th century, jurists complained about the harshness of the *mīrī* and its lowering of the rents. Thus, Ibn 'Abidin, whose work constituted a closure to Hanafi practice, had to accept willy-nilly that the "tax" on the waqf's rent be paid by the tenant rather than the administrator, simply because rents had rested on such low levels that no taxes could be afforded on them anymore—a perfect example of custom imposing itself on the norms of the *fiqh*.

Considering, then, that the primary aim of the state was to ensure the implementation of its *mīrī* system, which at its core was a hegemonic rent-control formula, what was behind its "interference" in the waqf system? Even though jurists tend to date the origins of waqfs to the time of the Prophet, the system that the Ottomans had inherited from the Mamluks probably goes back to what Marshall Hodgson had labeled the "Shi'i century" (pp. 945–1118), when in the Seljuq period the custom of putting landholdings into waqfs so as not to subject them to government seizure became common. In other words, it was under the rule of the small, militarized bureaucracies, and the *a'yān-amīrs* system, that waqfs had flourished. In fact, waqfs, together with shari'a law and Sufi orders, had become the sole domain of the *a'yān* and ulama as a protective shell against the excessive militarization of public life and landholdings. But it was under the Mongols, and later the Mamluks, that courtly control of waqf endowments became the norm. Besides attempting closer links with the ulama, what was the economic significance of such an approach? With the peasantry being trapped in corvée labor, and the value of rent for both *milk* and waqfs in disarray, courtly control over a domain that kept the *a'yān-ulamā'* factions quasi-autonomous would only create a balance between state *iqṭā'* and the waqfs, whether public or private. And the Ottomans were no different: "by the end of the 16th century the state had taken almost total control of the field of *waqf*" (p. 117). It was indeed that imbalance, due to the excessive assignments in landholdings among various types of rents, that gave the imperial state a golden opportunity to intervene. That investment in public waqfs, however, seems to have receded throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, while the traditional grip that the ulama maintained over the shari'a courts persevered, and the dismal rents only contributed toward more procedural fictions in the courts (*marṣad*, long leases, dismemberment techniques, etc.). It is therefore a gross error to conceptualize the language of the courts, as van Leeuwen does, as a discourse of the state (p. 153). But they are not anti-state, either. A centralization of the court system would have implied far more sophisticated and costlier methods of domination than those deployed by the Ottomans.

Waqf systems have been generally described as tools to protect private property in the face of large state landholdings. However, the late Mamluk scholar Burhan Tarabulsi (apparently assassinated in the first year of Ottoman rule in Syria) noted that most lands converted to waqfs were originally "possessed" by their "owners." If strict ownership was to be followed as a rule, the majority of waqfs would cease to exist. Clearly, then, if individuals were converting "possessed" rather than "owned" properties to waqfs, it could be either that those possessed properties felt much safer as waqfs (to transfer them to future generations related to the founder) or it could have been a "rent-control" mechanism. Properties that were part of a compendium would survive better the hegemony of the rent system controlled by the state.

To conclude, a city such as Damascus was kept with its major institutions running without much control from the imperial center. But the socio-economic ties with the rest of the empire—and, in particular, the rent-control mechanism (both in its militaristic and non-militaristic patterns)—did not help to create a homogeneous bourgeois culture within the city. Thus, even though waqfs contributed to creating an urban culture, they nevertheless represented more a sign of resistance to structural socio-economic problems than a healthy indication of an urban cultural renewal.